

Global Declaration to save River Dolphins

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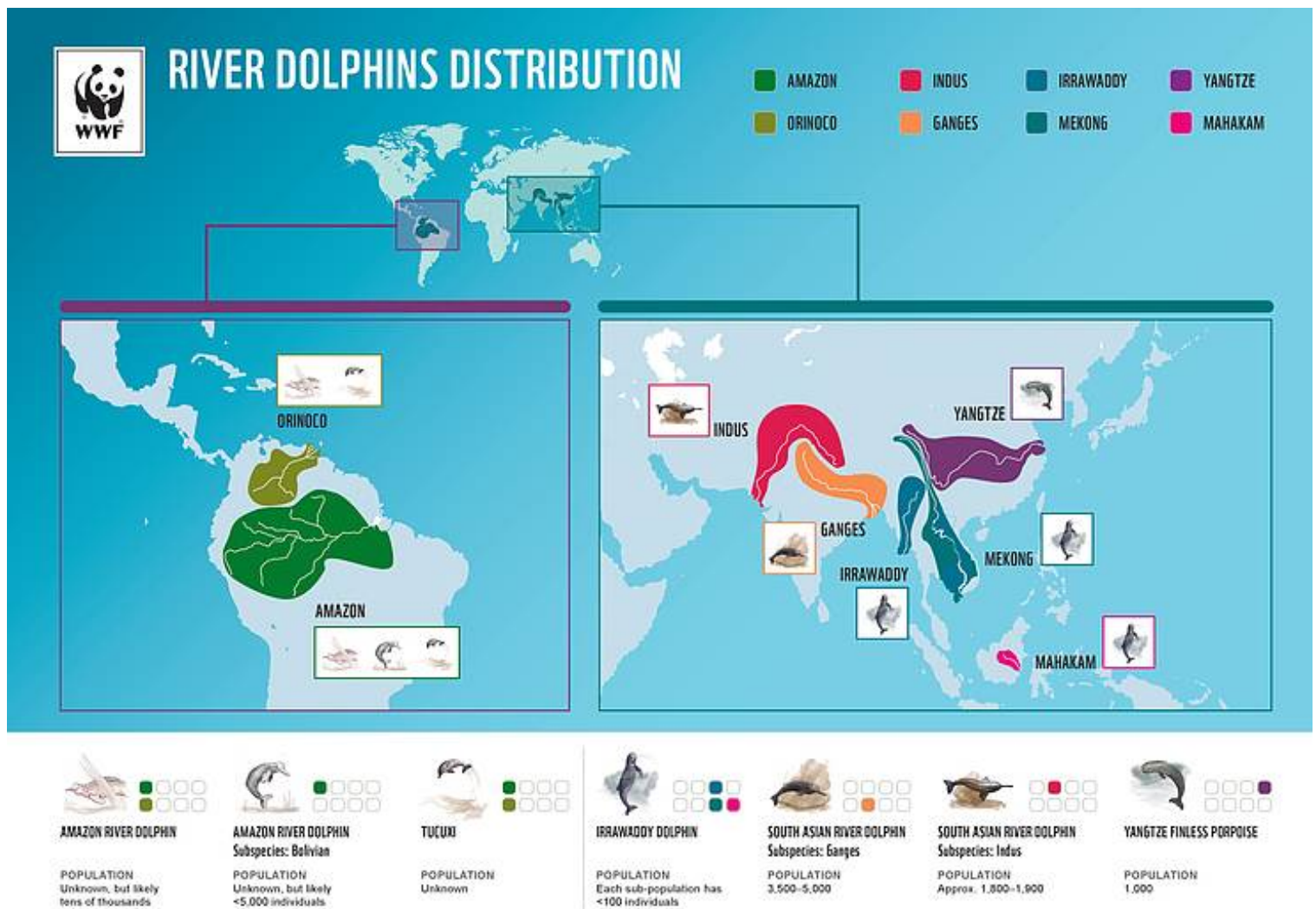
11 Asian and South American countries recently signed a deal in **Bogotá, Columbia** to save the **surviving species of river dolphins from extinction by 2030.**



[Ref- Tribune]

About River Dolphins:

- River dolphins are **mammals** that live in freshwater spanning **rivers like** Amazon and Orinoco in **South America**, and the Ayeyarwady, Ganges, Indus, Mekong, Mahakam, and Yangtze in **Asia**.
- They have **conical-shaped teeth** and **long beaks** that they use to **capture fast-moving prey** in murky water.
- They also have **well-developed hearing** that is adapted for both air and water.
- There are **six surviving species** of river dolphins:
 - Amazon river dolphin
 - Tucuxi dolphin
 - Ganges river dolphin
 - Indus river dolphin
 - Irrawaddy dolphin
 - Yangtze finless porpoise: (the world's only freshwater porpoise)



[Ref- WWF]

About the Global Declaration:

- It was endorsed by the **range countries in Asia and South America**, spanning from **Pakistan to Colombia**.

- **Aim:** To reverse the decline of all river dolphin species and bolster vulnerable populations.
- The declaration will **escalate collaborative endeavors** to safeguard the surviving river dolphin species.
- **Key aspects:** Developing and financing strategies to eliminate gillnets, reduce pollution, expand research, and establish additional protected areas.
- **Importance of Rivers:** They support **Indigenous Peoples**, local communities in remote areas and residents of megacities by providing agricultural land, fuel industry, business, and sustain wildlife.

Positive outcomes of global efforts:

- **Pakistan's endangered Indus River dolphins** have **nearly doubled** over the past two decades due to efforts by the government, WWF-Pakistan, communities, and NGOs.
- The **critically endangered Yangtze finless porpoise** population increased by 23% in the past five years owing to **strict protection measures** and conservation initiatives.
 - There are **only 1,249** Yangtze finless porpoises.
- WWF's **electronic pinger project** prevented dolphin deaths from gill net entanglement, in Mahakam River (Indonesia), that increased **40% of fish catch**.
- The **South American River Dolphin Initiative** played a key role in advancing science, satellite tagging river dolphins for behavioral research, raising awareness about the threats they face.

Decline in River Dolphin Population:

- River dolphin populations have fallen by **73% since the 1980s** due to multiple threats, such as unsustainable fishing, hydropower dams, pollution, and habitat loss.
- **Climate Change Impact:** It threatens river dolphins, as evident in the deaths of over 150 river dolphins in the **Amazon's Lake Tefé** due to drought.
- There are still only **2,000 Indus river dolphins** left in Pakistan.
- **Efforts can be made** to encompass pollution reduction, enhancing the dolphin's habitat, freeing dolphins entangled in fishing gear, and rescuing those trapped in irrigation canals.

About Ganga River Dolphins:

- **Characteristics:** Long, thin snout, rounded belly with large flippers and a blowhole at the top of head (acts as nostril).
- Because of the **sound it produces when breathing**, it is popularly referred to as '**Susu**'.
- **Calves** have chocolate brown skin at birth and **adults** have grey-brown smooth, hairless skin.
- **Reproduction:** Females are larger than males and give birth once every 2-3 years, typically to only one calf.
- The species is restricted to areas like:
 - India's Ganga-Brahmaputra-Barak river system,
 - Nepal's Karnali, Sapta Koshi and Narayani river systems,
 - Bangladesh's Meghna, Karnaphuli and Sangu river systems.
 - In India, they are found in the main stream of Ganga River followed by tributaries, Ghaghra, Kosi, Gandak, Chambal, Rupnarayan, and Yamuna.

- They were historically distributed in river systems of **Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu rivers**.
- **Threats:** Rocky barriers, dams, barrages, shallow water, and fast currents prevented upstream movement of the species in India and Nepal.
- **Conservation Status:**
- **IUCN:** Endangered (EN)
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule 1
- **CITES:** Appendix I



[Ref- India Today]